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Book Reviews

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BOOK REVIEWS

Big House, Little House, Back House, Barn: The Connected Farm Buildings of New England. By Thomas C. Hubka. (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1984. Pp. 226. Cloth. \$35.00.)

“American Farm Families and their Houses: Vernacular Design and Social Change in the Rural North.” By Sally McMurry. (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 1984. Pp. 365.)

Thomas Hubka is a formally trained architect and an architectural historian by avocation. His great interest in the vernacular farm architecture of northern New England led to a year-long stay in the area and ultimately to this book. Sally McMurry, a trained agricultural and social historian, is now teaching at Pennsylvania State University. Her dissertation is under consideration by a major press. Rural historians, especially those who research and write about New England and the Northeast, are remarkably fortunate to have both of these works appear at approximately the same time. Together, these two excellent works, written from different perspectives, help us understand the rural northeastern scene in a way that has not been possible previously.

Hubka's book has some technical faults: it has a very poor index; there is no listing of the figures, and errors are fairly common in the bibliography and in citations. Moreover, he sets up a straw man, and his shots at this target blur the focus of his significant book.

McMurry's focus is more clearly on New York than her title suggests, and she accepts, as Hubka does not, that the rural press was a snapshot of what rural opinion really was (or would be, subsequently). In her descriptions and analysis she uses pattern books and agricultural journals to document innovations in housing (very little on barns or outbuildings) in a way that causes us to rethink our traditional views of these buildings and their occupants. She has located over two hundred

house plans, from 175 different individuals. McMurry is able to reproduce brief biographies of 83 of these individuals. She argues that houses reflect the dominant view of the workplace up to about 1855; thereafter they reflect changes in women's work and in the perceptions of space. A good deal of her analysis is devoted to leisure places, such as parlors, and with the growing consideration of space for children.

Hubka is concerned primarily with connected farm buildings, although his book contains a surprising number of illustrations of farmsteads that do not conform to his counting-rhyme title. In fact, the reader, traveling the roads of northern New England, will find himself or herself looking at farm buildings in a new way, constantly reminded of Hubka's schematics and realizing how many buildings actually conform to his ideas. After six months of doing this I am of the opinion that there are more such farmsteads than he is willing to admit and that his area of concentration should be far greater.

If Hubka had simply analyzed and described these buildings and placed them in a historic setting, his would have been a marvelous book. Indeed, it is a very good one, but Hubka feels compelled to flail out at the hundreds of New Englanders who told him that these buildings were designed as they were because of climate conditions. Anxious to dispell what he feels is a pervasive New England misconception, Hubka does not always concern himself with the day-to-day use of these buildings. To some degree, McMurry falls into the same trap by analyzing her "pattern" houses as though they were the only houses built in the period; she may, as a result, overgeneralize about actual lifestyles. Both writers could benefit from a closer look at actual farming practices, although McMurry's work is a much better example of how such information may be modified and used to buttress a set of hypotheses.

A few examples of changes in day-to-day farming practices that might have affected farm architecture occur to me. Cook stoves began supplementing fireplace cooking after 1830 — a time that both writers acknowledge brought major changes in farm architecture. This innovation enabled farmers to design houses with a stove away from the heating center (in ells,

summer kitchens, and away from the central fireplace), and household routines then could expand outward into the "little houses." In northern New England and New York, this change also coincided with the development of a farm life based on multi-cropped land and a year-long harvest cycle. New forms of buildings (dairies, wood sheds, storage houses, and so on) were needed where the original one-crop money source may not have required such refinements. And, in Hubka's book, an era of larger barns may well simply reflect a change from sheep (usually housed outdoor) to cattle, as well as an expansion of dairying as a main financial source once railroads penetrated the rural sections. It would be quite interesting to see information on what sort of barns were built in Orange and Dutchess counties in New York after 1835 or in southern New Hampshire after 1850, as an example.

Other factors affecting farm architecture might have been considered. How much of the change described occurred as a result of the availability of custom-sawed lumber, once steam was applied to modernize sawmills? How many of these houses began as log houses and grew as the fortunes of the family grew? There are a large number of older houses in Maine, at least, in which the living room-parlor is the plastered log cabin of the original settler. How much of the change occurred because of the possibility of burning different types and sizes of wood in the increasingly sophisticated stoves of a later period — or the widespread use of coal in areas accessible to good coal transportation facilities? Both writers place a good deal of emphasis on house relocation with reference to roadsides, but neither adequately explains why this occurred or even whether it did occur in great numbers. Although this might have been an insuperable task, an analysis of a changing rural community with its changing architectural forms might have been useful. Some years ago James Wagner did such an analysis in a thesis on West Corinth, Maine, at the University of Maine at Orono, and he used the device of a mythical buggy ride around his settlement at various times in the nineteenth century, during which the houses, barns, locations, and other features were described. Wagner drew his information from diaries and the

manuscript census records. The end result was a much clearer view of actual farm life than was available before.

Both McMurry and Hubka neglect an important source of agricultural information: nineteenth-century farm diaries. McMurry, moreover, did her dissertation at one of the greatest centers for collected farm diaries in the Northeast and was less than an hour drive from another. Admittedly, these diaries do not contain house plans, but much house building and house altering is described in them. McMurry confines her examples mainly to published accounts. Hubka does in fact cite one farm diary, but he was in a position to use long diaries from Lebanon, Turner, Paris, Gorham, Winthrop, Yarmouth, South Bristol, East Corinth, and many other towns in his area of study. Both authors would have benefited from more manuscript work, and with more time might have enhanced their geographic claims, as well as their aesthetic judgments.

Hubka and McMurry will trigger similar observations, criticisms, and comments from all their readers. That this is so suggests the true importance of these two works. Both are flawed, but both truly break new ground in agricultural history. One suspects that they will be widely read, compared to a considerable degree, and create a small-sized (perhaps even large) cottage industry turning out new work designed to test their hypotheses, correct their errors, make new judgments about the material, and altogether enhance our view of the Northeast's agricultural past. These two books were written at the cutting edge, the frontier of historical scholarship, and we are fortunate to have them. All libraries in the region should own these books, as should scholars who think of themselves as agrarian or social historians. In addition, graduate and undergraduate readers will need to familiarize themselves with these new materials and new concepts. Both authors are to be congratulated.

David C. Smith
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History of Islesboro, Maine, 1893-1983. By the Islesboro Historical Society. (Portland, Me.: Seavey Printers, 1984. Pp. 429. Cloth. \$35.00.)

In many cases, a town history can be truly appreciated only by its local residents. Sifting through lengthy genealogies and unknown personalities and locations can be rather mundane for even the most applied historian, let alone the casual reader. Fortunately, the Islesboro Historical Society's *History of Islesboro* has not chosen to follow other examples. This is not to say that the usual genealogy is neglected or even absent. It is included, but does not constitute the main thrust of the publication.

History of Islesboro is the updating of events since J. P. Farrow's *History of Islesborough, Maine*, which was produced in 1893 and covered the first 145 years of the island's settlement. Unlike Farrow's work, this recent publication contains articles and information synthesized by the Historical Society from the expertise of a variety of native and summer residents. It describes the profound revolution that characterized this island's history during the past 90 years. At the turn of the century, Islesboro's subsistence-based economy was transformed into an economy dependent upon wealthy part-time summer residents. Such well-known personalities as George Tiffany, Maitland Alexander, Clarence Dillon, and G. W. C. Drexel, to mention only a few, constructed huge "cottage" mansions on its shores; guests such as J. P. Morgan, Teddy Roosevelt, Adlai Stevenson, Harold Vanderbilt, and Richard Nixon were constant reminders of Islesboro's popularity among America's upper class.

Many island natives, as well as mainland residents, were absorbed into occupations that revolved around the demands of the new summer community. The *History of Islesboro* illustrates many of the technological and cultural changes that developed through the century, in large part due to the influx of new residents. One interesting example is the progression from horse and buggy to automobile; cars were banned from the island by the wealthy until 1933.

Social, religious, and community organizations are also presented in concise, chronological histories. And just when all

these facts and figures threaten to overwhelm the casual reader, a short quip or local reflection is inserted to provoke a chuckle or a reminiscence about the “good life” forever past.

The *History of Islesboro* is quite obviously designed more for the participants in the island’s heritage than for the general reader. Nevertheless, as a thoroughly researched project it would satisfy even the most selective local history buff, and it is valuable in a larger context as an example of the historical forces that have transformed much of coastal Maine in the twentieth century.

Michael R. Herbert
Rockland, Maine

Thomas Lefebvre et le fief Kouesanouskek. By Honorius Provost, ptre. Translated by Shirley P. Barrett. (Privately printed. Pp. 40.)

Several years ago Honorius Provost, archiviste seminaire de Quebec, wrote a short biography of one Thomas Lefebvre. Recently a member of the Maine Historical Society had Mr. Shirley P Barrett translate into English the French language typescript of Provost. Both versions were privately published and distributed to many Maine libraries. The forty-page booklet is not offered for sale.

Small privately printed books generally receive little publicity. This one deserves notice because of its importance to Maine history. Lefebvre served the French as a loyal pawn in their plan to possess coastal Maine as far west as the St. George River. The French government, through the governor of Acadia, made a grant of land to Lefebvre ostensibly as recompense for his services but really to settle him and his family at the western boundary of the French colonial claim.

Provost was unable to learn Lefebvre’s date and place of birth but did find that Lefebvre was a cooper by trade. In 1669 he married a widow in Quebec, and for a time he and his wife (who bore him twelve children) lived at the Indian mission of Sillery, near Quebec. By August 1692, he was acting as official interpreter for the Abenaki Indians. Then, as an interpreter and

trader, he left for Acadia. His trading career brought him frequent financial difficulties, but as an interpreter he was useful to the new governor of Acadia. During the period of the French and Indian War, in September 1702, some Acadia fishing boats were captured by a Boston privateer. The governor of Acadia sent Lefebvre to Boston to negotiate the release of the fishermen and their boats. Lefebvre was also to learn what he could about English plans to invade Canada. Lefebvre was confined in Boston, however, and failed in his mission. Apparently he later returned to Quebec.

On May 7, 1703, he was given a grant of land at Kousanouskek (Wessaweskeag) running about five miles along the coast and about seven and a half deep, from Owls Head west across the Wessaweskeag River. Negotiators had met after the Treaty of Riswick in 1697 to fix the boundaries between Acadia and New England at the St. George River; apparently the French planned to have Lefebvre settle the area, create an Indian rendezvous, and thus establish an outpost for Acadia. Lefebvre's claim would also serve as a protection for the Baron de Castin at Pentagoet (Castine).

French and Indian harassment brought English retaliation. Lefebvre and two of his sons were captured in May 1704. General Church, leader of the New England troops, pillaged the French settlements along the Acadian coast. Although he failed to capture Port Royal, he took many prisoners, including Lefebvre and his sons. Lefebvre was released in 1706 and again returned to Quebec. There, his creditor, who had financed the first disastrous trading venture, pressed charges that ended in a judgment against Lefebvre. Even his wife's dowry was seized to satisfy the judgment. Provost wrote: "This was probably all the old couple had to lose, being by this time dependent on their children."

In his two-volume *History of Thomaston, Rockland and South Thomaston* (1865), local historian Cyrus Eaton had disposed of the French colonial aspiration at the "Keg" and St. George River in part of a sentence (vol. 1, p. 28). Provost's work fills this void. It is evident that he painstakingly searched the Quebec provincial records to find entries. From Baxter's *New*

France in New England, the *Collections* of the Maine Historical Society, and many other publications, he was able to piece together the unhappy life of Lefebvre. Those interested in Maine history will be indebted to Provost and to the Maine Historical Society member who arranged for the printing of Provost's work.

Roger B. Ray
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Rebuilding the Pulp and Paper Workers' Union, 1933-1961.
By Robert H. Zieger. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984. Pp. xi + 242. Cloth. \$19.95.)

Section 7a of the National Industrial Recovery Act, the challenge of the CIO, and the perseverance of union President John Burke fueled the rebuilding of the pulp and paper workers' union, according to Robert Zieger. Relying mainly on the voluminous correspondence of Burke's forty-eight-year tenure as president, Zieger has written a thorough and competent institutional history of the International Brotherhood of Pulp, Sulphite, and Paper Mill Workers (IBPSMW) during the turbulent 1930s and after. However, despite meticulous research and a solid thesis, this study suffers from the narrowness and aura of inevitability inherent in the traditional John R. Commons school of labor history.

The title of this work is perhaps inappropriate, as it is essentially a biography of John Burke. Zieger laments in his preface that the workers' story and the story of their union "remains largely unknown." Unfortunately, Zieger offers only Burke's story and the story of *his* union in this account. The rank and file remain invisible, except when they are reprimanded for laxity in dues payment or for failure to recognize the limitations of trade unionism.

Even though John Burke is the central figure in *Rebuilding the Pulp and Paper Workers' Union*, he remains something of an enigma. On the one hand, Burke ran on the Socialist ticket for governor of New Hampshire (1914), idolized Eugene Debs as a "Christlike" figure, and as late as 1940 voted for Norman

Thomas. On the other hand, he obstructed the efforts of leftists within the IBPSPMW throughout his tenure and took an active part in red-baiting CIO rivals in the late 1930s. It becomes apparent early in the book that the career of Burke, above all else, revolves around a cautious defense of his "little union," and, more important, his position as president-secretary. Zieger apologetically describes Burke's actions as pragmatic and his socialism as "non-Marxian."

The author's unwillingness to criticize Burke is symptomatic of his central problem: an inability to see beyond the confines of narrow trade unionism. As Zieger quite clearly points out, Burke essentially rebuilt the IBPSPMW by collaborating with industry executives during the most militant period of industrial union development in American history. As a rival to CIO organizing Burke's union offered a more conciliatory brand of unionism in a time of industrial crisis. By dismissing the CIO as a viable alternative, Zieger is able to rationalize a watered-down form of unionism for the industry. Moreover, he can justify Burke's acceptance of wage cuts over vehement protests from the rank and file, as well as the persistence of segregated locals and wage differentials for blacks and women. Zieger raises these very issues in his final analysis, but defends Burke's position and quickly passes over the matters. Zieger's defense is ineffective: one need only point to the success of the United Auto Workers to make a case for the viability of the CIO's more progressive brand of organizing in the 1930s.

Rebuilding the Pulp and Paper Worker's Union should be of particular interest to readers in Maine, as the IBPSPMW is the state's most important union today. In addition, the book is worth reading for Zieger's discussion of the struggle between industrial and trade unionists in the "turbulent thirties." It is unlikely, however, that readers wedded to the methodology and point of view of recent labor historiography will find themselves in agreement with the author.

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